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DRAMA

VOL. IV

MAY—JUNE MCMXXVI

NUMBER 12



SIXPENCE
MONTHLY

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THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
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DRAMA

MAY-JUNE MCMXXVI

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

THE BEST PLAYS OF APRIL
AND MAY

By Horace Horsnell

THIS topical apotheosis is a bit of a teaser. It resembles a modern honours list, and queer candidates are apt to squeeze themselves in. But we understand—do we not?—that prizes may be awarded for comparative, as well as for superlative merit. Not that I have any doubt as to the qualifications of "Autumn Fire." That unassuming pastoral tragedy would hold its own in any aggregation of its contemporaries. It is so well constructed, so admirably written, and sets about its affecting business so unaffectedly that, instead of bouncing you into approval, it simply wins your heart. And it is on these grounds that I award it the first prize.

Two other April plays—one a native, the other a foreign visitor—ran it close in my esteem. They are Miles Malleson's political "Conflict," and Sacha Guitry's little green-room comedy, Italianized as "L'Attore," with which Signor Ruggeri followed up his exotic Hamlet at the Globe. Like "Autumn Fire," "Conflict" is largely a success of good craftsmanship. Mr. Malleson knows all about the theatre, and happens also to be passionately interested in ideas. Here he mingles drama and dialectics so cunningly that you follow the play's action and its two-sided argument—the politico-economic and the psycho-erotic—with undivided interest. Both "Autumn Fire" and "Conflict" were first produced at the "Q" Theatre, which suggests that what our more enterprising suburbs think to-day, the West End occasionally acts upon to-morrow.

The Guitry comedy is in a class by itself. It is a fascinating little theatre-piece put together with the art that conceals itself, and it has that air of happy improvisation which is Sacha Guitry's *forte*. Such trifles demand style in their presentation. The tender artificialities of their spirit, their intimate susceptibilities, are apt to be wounded by happy-go-lucky or over-emphatic treatment. Scenic display offends them. Thus, although the decor of this production was of the rough-and-ready order one might expect of a travelling company, the technique of the company was good. The play seemed to me to be very adroitly acted. You might follow a good deal of its action before deciding, with any certainty, which was the star performance in it; though once Signor Ruggeri has registered himself, as the movies have it, his virtuosity becomes delightfully apparent. But as a mere and modest prize-giver, I must not assume the prerogatives of analytical criticism.

That disposes, then, of the two second prizes, with reasons for the choice, and leaves us with Sir Barry Jackson's pictorial "St. Bernard," Mr. Benn W. Levy's delightfully loquacious "This Woman Business," that impudently amusing comedy from America, "The Best People," and an interesting assortment ranging from "Dr. Knock" to Flecker's youthful "Don Juan."

I should highly commend "St. Bernard" for its decorative turn-out, while withholding several marks on account of the blotches on its scutcheon. The pedigree of this in-

THE BEST PLAYS OF APRIL AND MAY

teresting old mystery play is not too pure. Personally, I did not care very much for the bright ribbon round its neck, so to speak, or the tricks its French trainer had taught it. But admirers of Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies's porcelain art declared her tender-hearted bride a very pretty example, and several other members of the company wear Mr. Paul Shelving's delightful costumes and interpret Sir Barry Jackson's vivacious rendering of the modernized French text with excellent effect.

Technical skill in the theatre, whether that of the playwright or his interpreters, always gives solid satisfaction. And because of a personal susceptibility to it, as well as a consciousness of having done my duty towards other possibly more important competitors, I cannot pass over "The Best People" without special commendation. It is conventional enough in fibre, no doubt, but has the surprising American slickness of workmanship. Moreover, it is delightfully acted.

All the world knows now that long deferred opportunity—judged by her capacity rather than by her years—recently enabled Miss Olga Lindo to leap from the workaday rut into the front rank of popular actresses. And in this play, as in the two previous ones which also came from America, she maintains that position. The serious-minded may object that the *gamine* she impersonates has no real character, and that any competent actress could hardly fail to pong Milly's saloon-bar pleasantries over the footlights and hit the gallery in the heart every time. That however does not detract from the delight of Miss Lindo's performance, or qualify her rich, saucy exuberance, or cheapen the laurels herewith presented to her. Some of her colleagues, of course, must share them. There is, for instance, Mr. C. V. France, a beautiful actor, indeed, and Mr. Fred Volpé, among the veterans, to remind us that the English stage still has style and a tradition.

This brings us to May, to the Strike, and to Mr. Sean O'Casey. Poor May! Such ravages as the weather had not already made on her pristine beauty, the Strike looked horribly like completing. Small wonder the competition narrows! Yet two outstanding productions—real first-raters,

though neither of them native—come opportunely to her aid. They are Mr. O'Casey's "The Plough and the Stars" and—dare I so far flout the ritual of the lists as to mention opera?—"Figaro." The most conscientious judge may cherish a bias in favour of virtue; and surely this Mozartian darling is of virtue all compact.

The stage manners of grand opera always intrigue and must often astonish the dramatic specialist. Yet here, as in "L'Attore," the remarkable quality of the production was its good breeding. I won't touch upon more technical merits, for that would savour, in my case, of supererogation, as if one were to apply secular standards of criticism to the twanging of celestial harps or the fanfares of arch-angelic trumpets! But no student of the drama could fail to admire the triumph of tradition here, or the consummate artistry of the means by which the spirit of Mozart was revealed.

And now for the big, the unqualified award—the May cup to Mr. O'Casey. This would doubtless have been as fully deserved even had the field been larger. Genius has a way of walking off with the prize for which mere talent contends. And though he has as yet some talent to acquire, Mr. O'Casey unquestionably is endowed with genius. In awarding him the cup for his play, I should get those twin muses, Miss Sara Allgood and Miss Maire O'Neill to present it, for they did so much to reveal the quality of his candidature and to make it unchallengably secure.

Ere the cheers that greet this high award die away, another competitor—Mr. Sidney Howard's "They Knew What They Wanted," which gives so vivid a glimpse into the American melting pot—must be highly commended. You probably know its theme—fresh, effectively-written variations on the eternal triangle—and how cleverly those two American artists, Miss Tallulah Bankhead and Mr. Glenn Anders, supported by our own incomparable Mr. Sam Livesey, play it. This may not be a masterpiece, but it is an unusually interesting, well-contrived drama, and its inclusion in the productions of May does much to maintain the standards of a month the strike so seriously affected.

THE FOREIGN THEATRE

An Interview with Mr. Basil Dean

THE Plays, the Productions and the Acting—these, I think, are the main headings under which one's impressions of a foreign theatre quite naturally arrange themselves.

In Russia it was the acting which interested me most—perhaps because it has in such abundance the very quality which English acting seems in danger of losing. I mean virility. On the English stage it is becoming more and more difficult to find young actors with this quality. Russian acting is full of vigour and character, abounding in bold and adventurous breadth of treatment. This spirit shows itself even in the strength and brilliance of the make-up. The reason? Well, perhaps it is in the hardness of all life in Russia, and the actor's life in particular. Or perhaps it is that the revolution forced out the over-civilized elements of life, and that a new style of acting is growing up with its roots in rougher soil.

The plays themselves are nearly all intensely political and of very scant merit. Some of the older Russian classics are still being performed, as well as Shakespeare's plays, but they are usually chosen because of some fancied political significance. Apart from one or two light operas, all the plays to be seen in Russia take themselves very seriously. Even the few farces which are played are full of political satire. Meyerhold, who leads the extreme left wing in the Russian theatre, has long ago given up any pretence of working for the sake of art. The dramatists who work for him have to express "what the people desire to have expressed," and the aim of which he boasts is "To make one vast Soviet State throughout the world."

As to the production, there are examples of almost every style, ranging from the rather staid methods of the Art Theatre to the riotous experimentalism of Meyerhold's "Theatre of the Revolution" and Tairoff's "Jewish Kamerny Theatre." The defect of the extremist producers is that they care nothing for their authors, whom they treat merely as Aunt Sallys for their own ideas. The scenery is utterly unlike anything seen in this country. It is an attempt to represent ideas rather than objects on the stage.

A favourite device is to build up the stage on several different planes. But one suspects that there is a more practical reason for this than the producers care to admit, as the theatres are so wretchedly equipped with lighting that it is impossible to gain emphasis by means of shadows, or contrasting planes of light.

All the Moscow theatres have their own companies, recruited yearly. The actors are divided into seven classes, each with its own grade of pay. This scale holds good throughout all Russia, and actors have to win their way from one class to another. Only the very small number of "People's Artists" are exempt. Stanislavsky and Meyerhold are "People's Artists." Chaliapine was one. It is the highest honour which the Russian actor can obtain.

There are no theatres where the system of long runs prevails. Nor are there any theatres of the kind which in this country are called repertory theatres. Yet nearly all Russian theatres are repertory theatres in the true sense of the word—in the literal sense of the word. They have a repertoire. The English repertory theatre has none. Sometimes a play is revived, but it is produced all over again. In a Russian theatre a play is produced once and for all. If it is successful it may be played for many years—though never for more than two or three performances at a time—but the name of the original "régisseur" is still printed on the programme, even though he may now be dead.

Passing through Germany I found Reinhardt very depressed, the productions shoddy, the audiences listless. Everywhere the theatres reflected a complete lack of idealism.

In America I found the theatre full of vitality. The population are "mad on the theatre." Good plays and the crudest rubbish flourish equally in the most astonishing manner. Probably the explanation is that American society is like a great unstirred pudding. The different layers have not blended. The foreign population have not yet been properly absorbed, so that society has not become homogeneous.

THE FOREIGN THEATRE

There is a big audience for good plays, and there is a completely separate audience for plays such as "Abie's Irish Rose," which are so unbelievably crude that it is difficult to contemplate their success in London.

A tremendous will to improve is the American theatre's greatest asset, with the result that it is striding ahead at the most exciting speed. In methods of production it is far ahead of the English theatre, and the acting is good—especially the character acting. But I am speaking of the American *theatre*, not of the American *drama*. So far America has produced very

few good plays of her own, but English plays, such as "St. Joan," "Back to Methuselah" and "Heartbreak House," were seen in America before they had been performed in England, and dramatists like Lonsdale and Coward have found as ready a hearing in America as in England.

I have been accused of praising the American theatre at the expense of the English theatre. But there is no doubt that we are rapidly being outstripped by America. It seems a mistaken sort of kindness to conceal the fact. When one sees the red light, surely then is the time to shout.

WHAT THE STAGE GUILD STANDS FOR

By Gertrude Kingston

IN Haydn's Dictionary of Useful Information, a *Guild* is described as "an association of men of the same class or trade for their mutual aid and protection . . . in England of Saxon origin about the eighth century."

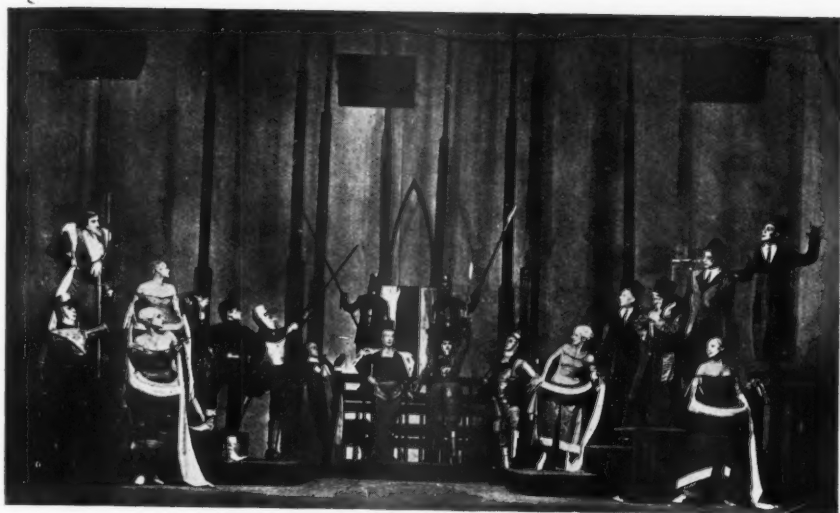
Nothing can describe more succinctly the object of the Stage Guild associated "for mutual aid and protection," and it was precisely because an older association invited the assistance of other classes and trades to settle disputes for them that the actors with the respect of their calling at heart left the senior body and entered into co-operation with theatrical managers. "We are," they said, "Artists, and in so far that we will certainly refuse to admit as members any one without stage training and experience we are a closed profession, but we will not practise the formulæ of industrial trades unionism."

Nothing to-day as we see by the terrifying deadlock in the most vital of our key industries, is to be gained by the obstinacy between employer and employee whose interests are not only a mutual but a national responsibility. How much more is this observable in the theatre, which is *not essential* to existence! Close the theatres and cinemas, music and dance halls, skating-rinks, broadcasting entertainments will fill the void. Never was a greater necessity

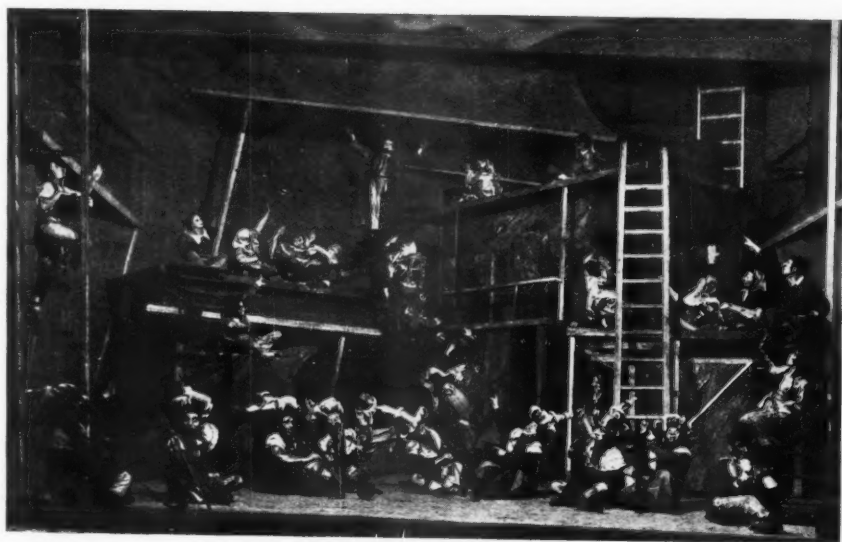
for the theatrical profession to stand shoulder to shoulder.

In the days when theatres were few in number, when managers had mostly graduated among actors if even they were not actors themselves—there was a camaraderie and tolerance that bridged over many a difference of opinion: indeed men like Henry Irving were happy only when surrounded by familiar faces. To-day when every change of bill brings a change of administration and company, it behoves us all to keep in close touch with one another.

The Stage Guild endeavours to hold the scales of justice evenly, but human nature being what it is, it would be optimistic to hope that the Stage Guild contract will not ever be circumvented—"there is no law," a Lord Chancellor once said, "however closely framed that does not leave an opening for a deft knave"—but if it is brought to the notice of the Stage Guild an impartial enquiry is held and pressure brought to rectify it. The Guild also influenced recent legislation for the licensing of touring managers. People who want to discredit the utility of the Bill declare that there are already new bogus managers on the road. Perhaps, but an offence cannot be easily proved in Law *before* it is an offence under the Act! (It was not punishable to sell



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WHAT THE STAGE GUILD STANDS FOR

drink in the United States before Prohibition was introduced.)

There is no other profession in the world which, while it endeavours to bring distraction, gaiety, pleasure to mankind, brings such disappointment and hardship to the individual. Few actors accumulate wealth, most die in poverty, and for this reason our modest subscription of membership includes insurance at death.

To counteract the extortionate commissions of the licensed theatrical employment agencies (that call for legislative measures) the Stage Guild has an agency free of booking fee or commission. Sanitary theatre conditions are enquired into. Complaints are heard. Advice is given on contracts. Infinite and varied are the functions of the four sections of managers, playwrights, artists and theatrical (or business) managers that are working together within the Stage Guild.

And now lastly in the face of competition from every form of professional enterprise for the public entertainment, the precarious livelihood of the player is menaced by the rivalry of amateur effort all over England. I do not refer to the local village drama nor to those play-producing centres that bring our great dramatic literature where it would not otherwise penetrate, but to those larger and less idealistically ambitious societies who hire the regular theatres or music-halls and who naturally attract vast bodies of their friends and admirers at the expense of the unhappy professional actor. For while theatre-owner, staff, musicians, billstickers reap a comfortable profit on all and sundry from the amateur companies, the actor has a "week out" on his tour because the theatre is occupied, and when there is no play there is no pay.

This alas! is a matter beyond the jurisdiction of the Stage Guild and must be left to the good feeling of the amateur bodies.

We are glad to be able to print the above article by Miss Gertrude Kingston, especially in view of the proposal, of which many amateur societies are already aware, that some sort of contribution should be made by amateur societies to the professional stage. The Council of the Stage Guild has already gone so far as to draft certain proposals

with a view to this object and these proposals were considered by a meeting of the Council of the British Drama League on April 22 and it was resolved that although no definite pronouncement could be made before bringing the matter before a meeting of the League's affiliated societies, every assistance possible should be given to the Guild if they wish to call a conference of amateur societies.

Further than this the Council clearly could not go without consultation with the societies affiliated to the League, and an opportunity will be afforded at the League's Annual Meeting on June 25 for our members to give some indication of their views on the matter.

We feel that if the Drama League is to take up any attitude, one way or the other, adequate opportunity should be given for consideration of the proposal in the light of what views may be expressed at the Annual Meeting, and therefore it is suggested that the question should be brought up again at the Autumn Conference, this being an occasion when we should hope for a really representative gathering of our societies. At this stage it will suffice to emphasize the fact that the proposal of the Stage Guild does not relate to amateur work in general, but only to the work of such societies as are accustomed to give performances in theatres and other buildings licensed for public entertainment.

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WALES AND HER DRAMA

By Shirland Quin

WHEN I recently received a letter from an American woman to tell me that she is writing a book on Modern Welsh Drama I was pleasantly surprised. But when I read further and learnt that she had spent the greater part of the summer in Wales so that she might appreciate more fully the work of Welsh dramatists which she hoped to see presented in London, I felt dismayed. So keen an appreciation is both interesting and significant, but the thought of anyone crossing the Atlantic with the idea that they would witness representative performance of Welsh plays in London is somewhat troubling. Although there is generally a successful Irish play running in one of the London theatres, productions of Welsh plays are few and far between. As to representative performances . . . there have never been any.

Actually it is only during 1925 that Welsh drama made a belated bid for a place in the modern theatre and it must be confessed that it has by no means achieved a success comparable to that which attended the Irish plays from the start.

Although some hold that the comparison is impossible, I only see a striking parallel between the problems that faced Irish drama a quarter of a century ago and the problems that are facing Welsh drama to-day, and it would seem that our future position in the modern theatre will depend on the way in which these problems are attacked.

That there are Welsh plays of merit and dramatists of promise are facts known beyond the boundary and across the Atlantic. One has only to take the principal Welsh plays produced in London—"Change" (produced 1912) and "The Dark Little People" (1924), by J. O. Francis; "The Comedy of Good and Evil" (1925), by Richard Hughes, and "Taffy" (1925), by Caradoc Evans—to see that the standard of these plays is extremely high. Thus it is all the more deplorable that Welsh drama has not succeeded in capturing the London audiences.

But it is not difficult to discover the reason for this failure.

When the Irish plays were first presented in London some twenty-five years ago, they were produced in a small hall and with no staff of experienced stage hands, yet so clearly did the players present in dramatic form the mind, characteristics and temperament of a race of people differing vastly from the English that the audiences were able to understand and appreciate the difference, instead of being mystified and rather bored as they have been by the Welsh plays. The whole secret is that these Irish plays were presented by native players.

The presentation of the Welsh plays has been a different story. With one exception, each play I have named was originally presented by Sunday play-producing Societies, noted for the care and attention they bestow on their productions. The plays were produced in modern theatres with capable stage hands, and by sound artists. In short they had every advantage but not the great essential—the native player.

The English actors are not to blame. However sound the artist may be, unless he has in him the blood of the people whence the dialect comes, I do not think he can give a true performance in a dialect play. Also there can be few things more distressing either to audience or to author than to hear the attempt at dialect suddenly relinquished in some tense moment and English unconsciously substituted. All the rhythm and character of the language is immediately lost, and the play suffers greatly. How greatly may be realized if you will imagine "Juno and the Paycock" presented by an all-English cast! The thing would be impossible. Yet that is the only type of production that Welsh dramatists have so far been able to obtain.

That Wales, in whose race lie all the potentialities for the great players and dramatists, should have no recognized Repertory Theatre or team of professional players seems incredible. Welsh Drama is growing, and is as full of vitality as the race from which it springs. By Mr. Hughes, Mr. Francis and Mr. Evans would its growth seem assured, but until there is a group of native professional players or an established

WALES AND HER DRAMA

Welsh Repertory Theatre, the work of these and other promising dramatists will continue to be handicapped and the growth of Welsh Drama seriously retarded.

At present the aspiring dramatist who badly needs the assistance of professional "try-outs" in his own country has no means of obtaining these, or the constructive criticism so essential in the early days. And the established dramatist whose plays are worthy of presentation in England or America is unable to obtain a team of native players accustomed to working together to interpret his work. Also there is the serious possibility that if no native interpretive talent is forthcoming that some writers may turn from the native drama and produce plays with themes which can and should be interpreted by English artists.

Black as this outlook may seem, the interest in the Drama that is increasing yearly all over Wales is full of promise. In February,

1924, the Portmadoc Players visited the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, and successfully presented a triple bill of one-act plays, which included "The Man Born to be Hanged," by Richard Hughes. In July, 1925, two Welsh companies—one from the North and the other from the South—gave performances at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. The North Wales company presented "Cloudbreak," by A. O. Roberts (which was also given at the Lyric Theatre production), and the South Wales company gave "Y Dieithryn," by D. T. Davies.

And now, within the last few weeks, a new enterprise is being started. A little band of five players is setting out from Swansea to present native players in native plays all over Wales. Whether this gallant little company will succeed in laying the foundations for the Welsh National Theatre remains to be seen, but I am sure that all who are interested in the Drama will join in wishing them well.

THE BELASCO CUP COMPETITION

THE Huddersfield Thespians, who represented the Drama League in the Belasco Cup Competition in New York, returned on May 24 on the *Antonia*.

The visiting company were selected as one of the four best teams for the final, and secured a first prize in the class of published plays with F. Sladen-Smith's "St. Simeon Stylites."

The cup went for the third year in succession to the Dallas Little Theatre, Texas. Five judges decided the issue and it is good to record the fact that no adverse criticism of their conclusion marred a tournament that for enthusiasm and keen endeavour equalled any sporting event. The visiting team were welcomed and entertained beyond the ordinary bounds of cordiality and Mr. Hartwig's organization of the tournament and his energetic enthusiasm on behalf of all competitors placed him in the highest esteem of those who had the pleasure of his guidance and direction.

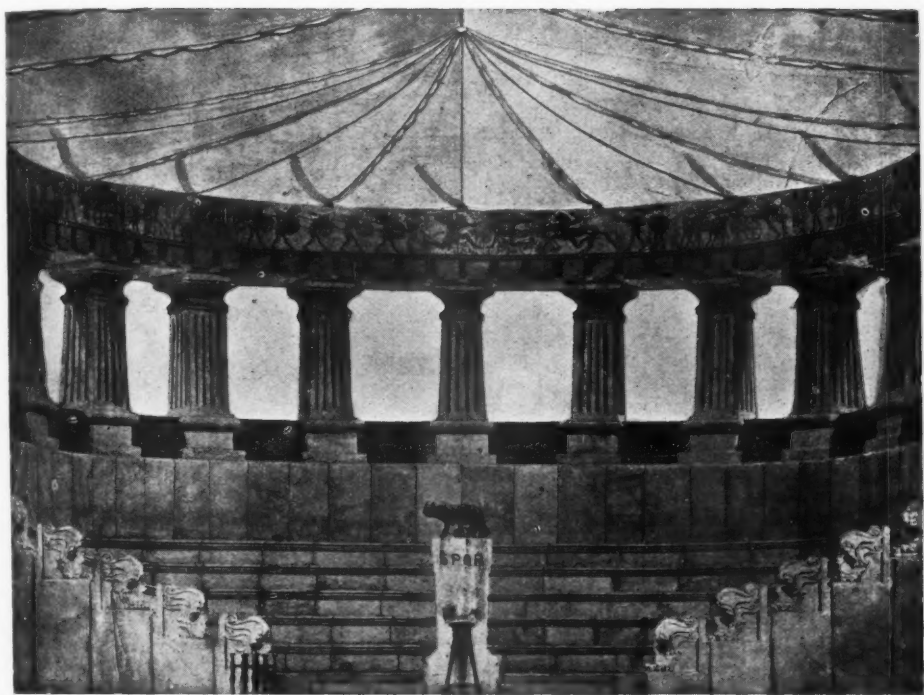
The experiences of this 1926 tournament

have proved that a play of more than thirty-five minutes' duration is undesirable, and "St. Simeon Stylites" lasted well over this period. Any team with any hope of success must also have every character portrayed with 100 per cent. efficiency, and unless expense is of no consideration should take its own scenery.

Sixteen plays were presented, and most of them had obviously been selected for what is known in America as "kick." In England they would be described as the "slice of life" type.

Most of the plays cannot be said to represent the real Little Theatre work of America, humour and the scenic art of the theatre being lacking. The favourable reception of "St. Simeon" was due largely to its humour and originality.

English teams visiting America in future tournaments would be well advised to avoid the better-known plays and should, if possible, take a play specially written for the occasion by a competent playwright.



DESIGN BY SIR LAWRENCE ALMA-TADEMA, R.A., FOR A SCENE IN "CORIOLANUS," AS PRODUCED BY SIR HENRY IRVING AT THE LYCEUM THEATRE, APRIL 15, 1901. IN THE COLLECTION OF MR. R. C. MC'LEERY, RECENTLY PRESENTED TO THE THEATRE SECTION AT THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM.

TORONTO : THE HART HOUSE THEATRE

S EVEN prosperous seasons and a record of sixty-three productions by June, 1926, marks a pretty sturdy effort in the sphere of amateur dramatics, for this represents not an aspiration, but a fact, in Hart House Theatre, a Canadian playhouse, founded by Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Massey, of Toronto, whose Director is now Mr. Walter Sinclair.

Mr. and Mrs. Massey had for many years made the study of the theatre their principal hobby, and an opportunity came to put their ideas into concrete form when the great building on the grounds of the University of Toronto, known as Hart House, was built by the Massey Foundation, under Mr. Massey's direction. Hart House itself is a vast Gothic structure, in which the student finds all he needs outside the lecture room—gymnasiums, swimming bath, library, dining-room, lounges, chapel, music-rooms, billiard-rooms, art gallery, rifle range, racquet courts. It seemed to supply almost every want of the undergraduate, and when a great space in the centre of the building, beneath the beautiful quadrangle, was, by a happy inspiration of the founders and by the skill of the architects, Messrs. Sproatt and Rolph, of Toronto, turned into a perfectly-equipped theatre, there was nothing left to be added.

Hart House Theatre, although part of a larger structure, is a separate unit in itself, operated by a small incorporated body called the Syndics of Hart House Theatre, the chairman of which is Mr. Vincent Massey, and the other members Mrs. Massey, Dr. George H. Locke (the Public Librarian of Toronto), and Lieut.-Col. G. F. McFarland, a leading barrister, who acts as honorary treasurer. Although the theatre is on University grounds, its charter gives it wide freedom of action as an amateur repertory theatre, operated for the benefit not only of the University, but of the general public, who provide most of its clientele.

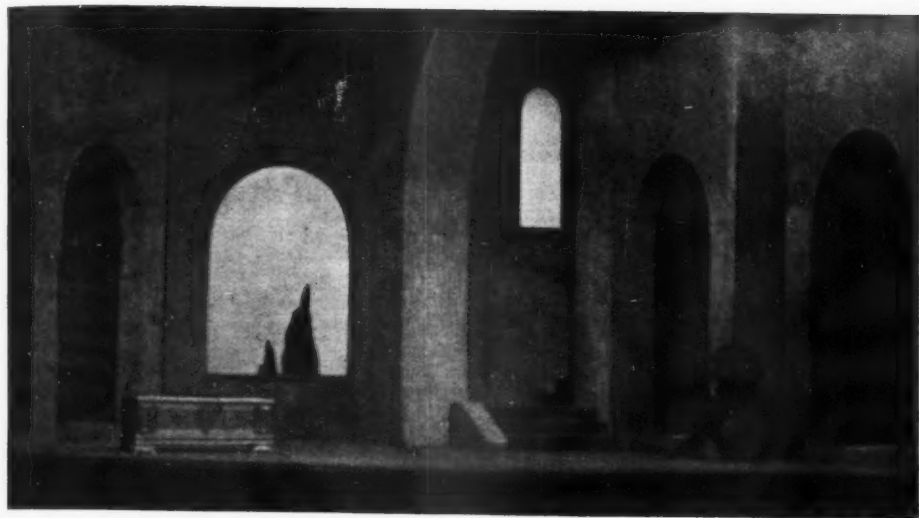
The theatre is almost perfect in its equipment, and is probably as complete as that of any theatre of its size. In electrical apparatus, apart from a light-bridge over

the stage, and a projection box at the rear of the house, and the usual footlights, sciopicons, floor-pockets and border-lights, both for fore-stage and main stage, it possesses a switch-board with about eighty switches and dimmers with interlocking devices and master-handles. All the scenery and properties are built and painted in the theatre, which possesses the necessary accessories for this work.

The visitor to the theatre enters by a long ramp leading from its own outside entrance, and finds himself in a charming foyer hung with the photographs and records of its first seven seasons. You find from these that already several hundred actors and actresses have appeared in its productions, and that about a score of this number have left Hart House Theatre to take up a career on the professional stage. The theatre auditorium seats about four hundred and fifty, greater numbers having been rightly sacrificed to the comfort of those who can be accommodated. Like all buildings that have been skilfully adapted to special physical conditions, the architecture of the theatre has a peculiar beauty of its own. A series of great arches which support its roof, and, incidentally, the quadrangle above, lend the auditorium a unique charm. An ample fore-stage with special flanking openings gives an unusual opportunity for plays of a decorative nature. The theatre has adopted the interesting practice of using a brilliant jade green curtain for comedies, while for other productions a black velvet curtain with broad vermilion stripes is employed.

The theatre, from 1919 to 1921, was under the direction of Mr. Roy Mitchell, who had been Technical Director of the Greenwich Village Theatre, New York. The third, fourth, fifth and sixth seasons were under the direction of Mr. Bertram Forsyth, who had had considerable experience as an actor with leading members of the London stage.

Mr. Walter Sinclair, who is now in charge of the theatre, was for some years before his appointment the Director of the Amateur Club of Hong-Kong. In a series



SETTING FOR PAOLO AND FRANCESCA. ACT
I. DESIGNED BY W. SINCLAIR, HART HOUSE
THEATRE, TORONTO.

TORONTO: THE HART HOUSE THEATRE

of notable productions there he proved himself a producer of great versatility, both as a trainer of actors and as a designer of settings. In his work at Hart House Theatre, Mr. Sinclair has already enhanced the distinguished reputation which preceded him. Toronto is most fortunate, indeed, in having secured the services of a most brilliant and imaginative producer in the new Director of its little playhouse.

The Director of Hart House Theatre is supported by a small professional staff, but the actors and actresses are all amateurs, and are chosen from the community at large, which is peculiarly rich in amateur dramatic talent. The theatre this year has adopted the practice of inviting guest directors to take part in its season. Jacob Ben Ami, of New York, produced, last autumn, "Samson and Delilah," by Sven Lange, taking the part of Samson himself. Mr. Iven Payne, Director of Drama in the Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, is producing Galsworthy's "The Silver Box" this spring.

The plays at Hart House Theatre each run for one week, occasionally longer. A large list of subscribers provides the nucleus of the audience. The following list of productions of the last three seasons which follows will show the wide range covered in the theatre's work:—

- "The Man from Blankleys"—F. Anstev.
- "The Toils of Yoshitomo"—Torahiko Kori.
- "Castles in the Air"—Bertram Forsyth.
- "L'Enfant Prodigue," a Pantomime—Play by Michael Carré, film, music by André Wormser.
- "The Hostage" ("L'Otage")—Paul Claudel.
- "The Bonds of Interest"—Jacinto Benavente.
- "Three Weddings of a Hunchback"—H. Borsook.
- "The Weather Breeder"—Merrill Denison.
- "The Younger Generation"—Stanley Houghton.
- "The Monkey's Paw"—W. W. Jacobs.
- "Great Catherine"—Bernard Shaw.
- "The Romantic Young Lady"—G. M. Sierra.
- "At the Hawk's Well"—W. B. Yeats.
- "The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet"—Bernard Shaw.
- "The Younger Generation"—(Revival).
- "Misalliance"—Bernard Shaw.
- "The Mollusc"—A. H. Davies.
- "Gold"—Eugene O'Neill.
- "Riders to the Sea"—J. M. Synge.
- "The Sabine Women"—Leonid Andreyev.
- "The Freedom of Jean Guichet"—I. A. MacKay.
- "Outward Bound"—Sutton Vane.
- "The Winter's Tale"—Shakespeare.
- "Samson and Delilah"—Sven Lange.
- "I'll Leave it to You"—Noel Coward.

- "The Ship"—St. John Ervine.
- "Turandot, Princess of China"—First dramatized by Count Carlo Gozzi.
- "Outward Bound"—(Revival).
- "Chester Mysteries of the Nativity"—(Revival).
- "The Rose and the Ring"—Harris Dean (from Thackeray's Fantasy). Music by R. Cox.
- "The Angel in the House"—Eden Phillpotts and Macdonald Hastings.
- "Autumn Blooming," "And they met Again," "Man's World"—Fred Jacob.
- "Paola and Francesca"—Stephen Phillips.
- "The Silver Box"—John Galsworthy.
- "Good Friday"—John Masefield.
- "Advertising April"—H. Farjeon and Horace Horsnell (from the Italian). Arranged by C. B. Fernald.
- "If Four Walls Told"—Edward Percy.
- "The Toy Cart"—(From the Hindu). Recreated by Arthur Symonds.

Hart House Theatre Follies.

It should be pointed out that of these plays a number are by Canadian authors, most of which have been written under the inspiration of the theatre itself. One of its underlying objects in fact is to encourage the development of the Canadian drama. In this aspiration the founders are wise enough to realize that playwrights are only developed by an active working relationship with a practical playhouse. Another important side of the theatre's activities is the summer school in the Art of the Theatre, which has now been in operation for three seasons. This provides a course of instruction for practical workers in the amateur theatre. Other plans are maturing to widen the scope and usefulness of this little playhouse. It has already taken its place among the most important amateur theatres in North America, and promises to become a centre of theatrical experiment second to none on either side of the Atlantic.

"YOU NEVER CAN TELL."

On April 28 an excellent production of "You Never Can Tell" was given by the Friendly Centurians Dramatic Club at the Cripplelegate Theatre. Both the producer, Mr. James Warren, and the actors are to be congratulated on a very spirited performance. The play was taken at a good pace throughout, and it was impossible for one's interest to flag, which so often happens at amateur performances. The acting was so uniformly good that it seems unfair to select any individuals for special mention, but one might say that the rather difficult part of Mrs. Clandon was played in a particularly sympathetic and convincing way.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

“**D**RAMA” appears this month after an interval which must be ascribed to the credit—or discredit—of the General Strike. For nearly a fortnight the work of the League was brought to an almost complete standstill, but it is noteworthy that even on one of the darkest days we received what was almost a record number of new subscriptions. At the same time it was necessary to cancel the London Club Competition owing to the difficulty of arranging the preliminary trials, and the meetings to initiate the National Festival in the various area centres had each and all to be postponed. The meeting of the London area, however, was held in London on Saturday, May 29, and the other meetings will have been held, we hope, in Bath, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, and Glasgow in time for a general review of the situation to be printed in the July number.

We have to congratulate the Huddersfield Thespians on their success in the New York Tournament, a short account of which appears on another page. The enterprise which sent out a company of nine persons has been rewarded, and we are glad to feel that credit has been done both to the Huddersfield Society and to the League which they so ably represented. We also acknowledge the spirited action of the Gloucester Vale Group, which, on its own account, undertook the same adventure. But we are obliged none the less to record the resolution which has been passed by the Tournament Committee that in future no society entering for the English Competition shall be permitted to regard itself as eligible for the New York Tournament unless officially selected by the British Drama League. The reasons for this recommendation will, we feel, be obvious.

With a view to encouraging the production by villages of plays expressive of rural life and thought, the League is organising a matinee of Village Plays to be held in London next December. Any Group may submit a one-act play—published or unpublished—which has been written expressly for a village society. Such plays must be in the hands of the DRAMA by September 1 next. Five or six plays will be selected by a Reading Committee, to be performed at the matinee. It should be noted that any Group sending in a play to the Selection Committee must be prepared to perform it and to pay the travelling expenses and acting fees, if any. No play must take more than thirty minutes in performance.

The League's Annual Meeting will be held on June 25 at 2.30 at 8 Adelphi Terrace. Besides the ordinary business (this year of more than usual importance) the meeting will be the occasion of the unveiling of the bust of William Archer, by Mr. Granville-Barker. The bust was made by Mr. Derwent Wood, R.A., and completed only a few weeks before his death.

MONTHLY BOOK LIST

Creative Criticism. By J. E. Spingarn. Milford, 6s.

The Comic and Realistic in English Drama. By John B. Moore. University of Chicago Press. *English Masques.* Edited by Herbert Arthur Evans. Blackie. 2s.

The Jew in Drama. By M. T. Landa. King. 12s. 6d.

Pushkin. By D. S. Mirsky. *Gogol.* By Janko Lavrin. Routledge. 6s. each.

Shakespeare's Monarchs. By J. C. Stobart. Hodder and Stoughton. 3s. 6d.

Best Plays of 1924-25. By Burns Mantle. Small, Maynard and Co., Boston. 15s.

WILLIAM ARCHER used to declare that the relation of the drama to the theatre is exactly the same as that of a ship to the sea. "A play is a ship destined to be launched in a given element—the theatre." It is difficult to imagine that anybody with a practical knowledge of the theatre would deny this. But Mr. Spingarn has used up a large amount of his book in attempting to deny it. He is afflicted with that flabby sort of sentimental idealism which demands that an artist should write only to please his own soul. He seems to have actually deluded himself into believing that good dramatists write their plays without thought of the playhouse. If they happen to be fit for the playhouse, well and good. If not, what does it matter? The dramatist has pleased his own soul, and that is all that matters to him. Or so Mr. Spingarn likes to think. It is hardly surprising that he does not succeed in making his preposterous theory sound anything but preposterous, and by the end of his argument he has become so hot and bothered that he declares that critics who disagree with him need, not refutation, but a new education. Such criticism is hardly creative.

Mr. Moore's examination of English comedy makes an extremely valuable, scholarly, and interesting book, but it is terribly grave and business-like. At the end of it one feels as if one had been reading Shakespeare's comedies in a Methodist chapel.

Mr. Evans' book is of an importance quite out of proportion to its unpretentious price and appearance. Hitherto hardly any of the masques have been accessible to the ordinary reader. Here are sixteen of the fifty printed masques still extant, admirably presented with a complete bibliography and a most excellent introductory essay, doubly valuable because so little has been written in English about the masque.

"The Jew in Drama" makes good reading, but Mr. Landa writes more as a historian than a literary critic, so that "Potash and Perlmutter" claims almost as much of his attention as "The Merchant of Venice." It is a scholarly book, marred by a rather exasperating readiness to take offence.

Prince Mirsky's book on Pushkin contains too much biography and too little criticism for our taste. The excellence of his chapter on Pushkin

as a playwright makes us grumble all the louder. M. Lavrin, on the other hand, has considered the general characteristics of Gogol and his work without fiddling with biographical trivialities, in the vague hope that they may be important. But it is disappointing that he uses up so much of his all too short chapter on Gogol's plays with an unnecessarily detailed description of the plot of "The Inspector-General."

"Shakespeare's Monarchs" is based on twelve broadcast lessons for elementary schools. So many passages from the play are quoted that the book forms a magnificent "anthology of declamation," while the explanations and criticisms are mercifully free from that condescending air of painstaking brightness so usual in books or literature written for children.

"Best Plays of 1924-25" gives very detailed descriptions of the plots of the ten plays "most worthily representing the season in America." This should be an excellent tonic for those who imagine that the American drama is superior to our own, as the only play of merit is one which shows O'Neil in his most sensational mood. The others are of the type of "Dancing Mothers," "The Guardsman," "Pigs," and "The Firebrand." There is much else of interest in the book, including an account of the Little Theatre Tournament, reviews of the season in New York, Chicago, California and Los Angeles, and statistics of long runs in Broadway headed by "Abie's Irish Rose," with 1,313 performances, and "Lightnin'" with 1,291.

The Loafer and the Loaf. By Evelyn Sharp. *If Youth But Knew.* By K. C. Spiers. Adelphi Publishing Company. 3s. 6d.

Lately there has been a quite alarming growth in the superstition that a fantasy is the easiest sort of play in the world to write. Some quaint costumes, a little music, and plenty of opportunities for all the characters to fall a-jiggling—these seem to be the chief ingredients in the popular recipe. But they are not the real ingredients of fantasy. They are merely the sugars and spices. In "The Loafer and the Loaf" Miss Knowles has used them liberally, but the play itself is so unappetisingly solid that the result has an unfortunate resemblance to a suet pudding sprinkled with pink sugar and decorated with a pie-frill.

To describe Mr. Spiers' play one finds oneself groping in one's mind for words from the old-fashioned playbills, words like "tense," "strong," "gripping," "thrilling." But if this play is a little old-fashioned, it is old-fashioned in the most admirable way. It has a capital story, there is a sincere, downright "love-interest," and it is packed with excitingly dramatic scenes, especially in the second act, which takes place in the Nigerian bush and ends with as honest a scrap with the niggers as ever we hope to see upon the stage. There is a masculinity about this very attractive play which is infinitely refreshing.

N. M.

THE AMATEUR REPERTORY COMPANY

By Maude Scott

THE Amateur Repertory Company seems to me to be the best solution of the problem of the many talented young people who wish to devote themselves seriously to the drama as an art, but are at the same time dependent on their own earnings for a living. So many of these young people with reliable and not too hard positions in business spend their lives in a vain struggle to secure a foothold on the professional stage. Clever though they may be, the majority meet with nothing but disappointment and poverty without even the satisfaction of hard work, and losing all the enjoyment that their dramatic ability should give them.

The professional stage of to-day cannot be regarded as a means of earning a living for any but those who possess the most striking combination of qualities. These people are very rare.

It is in the Amateur Repertory Company that talented young people without these unusual qualifications may find their satisfaction and at the same time enjoy and develop their art to its highest capacity, without the overwhelming anxiety about bread and butter which the throwing up of a good position for the possibilities of a professional career entails. Such organizations as the Maddermarket Theatre at Norwich, the Sheffield Repertory Theatre, and the St. Pancras People's Theatre in London offer to the serious amateur the absorbing interest that any art seriously undertaken does offer.

The professional producer and the regularity of the productions assure an atmosphere favourable to serious work, and talent and seriousness of purpose in any direction are always sure of appreciation which is by no means the case on the professional stage.

Theatres of this kind are able to give a varied and interesting programme of plays, to arrange programmes to suit the special abilities and qualifications of their members, to provide regular and appreciative audiences, and in fact to give the amateur almost ideal conditions for practising the

art of acting. True, the amateur will generally be a little handicapped by having already done his day's work, but this handicap is as nothing compared with the grinding anxiety of not knowing from where your next meal is coming, and it is well to remember that change of interest is very often more restful than doing nothing.

The standard of work achieved by these Amateur Repertory Companies is sometimes very remarkable. This is, perhaps, not the case so much outside London, but in London many of the cleverest amateurs prefer to join a dozen amateur societies and go wherever the biggest part offers at the moment. No good team work can be done this way and no good Repertory Company is possible on this basis. In fact, experience has taught me that better work can be done with a less talented team of people who will thus concentrate, and that the best productions are often by no means those which have had the greatest number of talented actors.

I should like to ask all serious amateurs, with or without aspirations for the professional stage, to consider the Amateur Repertory Company and its opportunities and interests. It will probably specially interest those with professional aspirations to know that during this season, one person, acting regularly in a theatre of this kind in London, without any seeking, has received three separate offers of professional engagement from first-class managements, whilst another obtained an engagement with a well-known touring management. Both these people, however, offered a very unusual combination of qualities though of a totally different kind. From this it will be seen that whilst I do not suggest that the Amateur Repertory Company's function is to supply the professional stage, it is evident that striking and exceptional qualities are by no means hidden on the amateur repertory stage, and that managers are to be found at these places; in fact I should say that the professional student or amateur with stage aspirations has more chance of being seen and appreciated under these conditions than by travelling with small touring companies.

AMATEURS AND AUTHORS

An Open Letter on the Fee Problem

ON page 141 of DRAMA for April, the Report of the Adult Education Committee is brought under review. On the final page of the same number a small provincial club, with a following of 217 supporters, admits having paid ten guineas for the privilege of producing a play with four characters, plus a further four guineas, with respect to a second shorter play evidently considered necessary owing to the paucity of characters in the major production.

One cannot obviously pour the contents of a pint measure into a liqueur glass. Not unnaturally there was a loss on the venture. Following this loss, the promoters artlessly admit having found a successful market for their wares with the "School for Scandal," and then suggest that the Drama League should help them to obtain a refund of part of the fees.

Let us endeavour to have fees placed on a royalty basis by all means, and especially so in fairness to the smaller clubs. Let us, however, be practical. While cases occur such as the one I have cited, so long will the era of a royalty basis be postponed. One cannot condone the present system by the payment of two fees when the wisdom of incurring a liability for one is questionable, and then expect the Drama League or any other organization to be successful in levering away mountains.

Apart from the debatable value obtained for fourteen guineas as compared with works of equal or greater value obtainable for nothing, the dictum laid down in the Report of the Adult Education Committee is so clearly defined that it cannot be too firmly insisted upon.

On page 202 of the Report, the following finding is unequivocally laid down: "*The bane of the amateur movement has been . . . the inadequate imitation of West End successes.*" Such a finding is obviously there to be taken seriously and cannot be ignored by any organization accepting the remainder of the Report as an official endorsement of their activities. To my mind, the lead thus given goes to the very root of the matter

when viewing the position with respect to fees.

After all, the question is largely one of demand and supply, and there is really no necessity for any club to become liable for fees with respect to current commercial plays at all. I would suggest, then, that all refrained from doing so for at least a couple of years. To be perfectly frank, is the modern commercial drama of true use to the amateur artistically or financially? I know that during the last year or two such transient plays as "Tilly of Bloomsbury," "Brown Sugar," etc., have been played from one end of the country to the other, although we in the towns have most of us the clearest recollection of their professional presentation. Estimable plays though they may be in their own way, what good has their amateur production served in comparison with the numerous delightful revivals and experiments which might have been given in their stead?

At the present moment, "Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure" is being played in every part of London, despite the fact that the professional production is one of the clearest and most treasured of recollections in the mind of every genuine play-goer. Talented as every amateur "Ambrose" may be, those of us who really take the theatre seriously, prefer to keep unsullied our memory of the last important performance of Sir Charles Hawtrey. If each of these "Applejohns" would only be content with the far better part of Falstaff in the more amusing play of the "Merry Wives of Windsor," or "Henry IV" Part I, and if the societies concerned would only give these productions the same care and brightness, what a wonderful series of performances might be achieved pregnant with true development.

I do not advocate the shutting out of modern plays altogether; there are some modern plays which would be a work of mercy to present in certain poor neighbourhoods and country districts. But in order to facilitate such work, we realize more fully than ever that the royalty basis is necessary.

AMATEURS AND AUTHORS

I therefore definitely propose that for the next year or two all plays subject to fixed fees should be strictly put under a ban.

I am sure the Amateur Movement is now of sufficient strength to practise such restraint without incurring any loss of support. What is more probable is that there will be a gain of interest and strength, as experiment replaces imitation, for it is upon the former that true success is ever based.

Leaving the more hackneyed of the old plays for the moment, what club of standing will take the lead by editing and producing "Money" or "The Beaux Stratagem" or "The Clandestine Marriage" in that spirit of lightness and daintiness, allied with the slightest accentuation of burlesque, which is the keynote of the Lyric, Hammersmith, at its best? Or again, "Money" wants ruthless pruning but the material is there. The first scene is remarkably good, of course.

Shakespeare wrote his plays for All Time and we have seen how "Hamlet" can thrill one to the core when played in modern costume. In Garrick's time Shakespeare was largely acted in the dress of that day with powdered wigs and patches. Who is going to be sufficiently bold to give one of the lighter comedies a Watteau or Georgian setting? Why not? In the hands of a producer of sufficient elasticity the result could scarcely be a failure, whilst something exceptionally exquisite might evolve. It must not be forgotten that the "trunk and hose" era of costume is nowadays regarded as somewhat stagey by most people and is perhaps the least popular. So again why not?

Yes, indeed, there is still plenty of scope for experiment and what is more, freshness of experiment!

REGINALD M. SEWELL.

27 Hampstead Hill Gardens, N.W.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

EAST GRINSTEAD.

The East Grinstead Repertory Company opened their second season with a performance of Shakespeare's "Merry Wives of Windsor," on April 13 and 14. It was unfortunately impossible to give the play on the actual date of Shakespeare's birthday, but the company took special pleasure in the fact that they were contributing their small share in keeping green the memory of a great dramatist and poet.

The play was given with an inner and outer stage which make for swift and uninterrupted progress of scene after scene, and thereby help in no small degree the growth and development of the plot. There was one interval and no cuts, and the final curtain was down in two and a half hours after its first rising.

It was particularly interesting to learn from various prejudiced spectators that they were amazed at the life and swing of the performance, and that for the first time they had thoroughly enjoyed a Shakespeare play.

Is not this a testimony to the advantage of this method over the more usual and cumbrous one where change of scene follows change of scene, till little is left in the memory but a wearisome lifting and falling of the curtain and of insistent and often inappropriate music, in spite of the accomplished acting of a professional company?

It enables a body of sincere though inexperienced players to concentrate on the play and to present it to their audience with simplicity. The play's the

thing. The incidental music was chosen from the rich library of compositions written at the time of Shakespeare and was played by a combination of string quartet and piano.

KENSINGTON.

Some of those who missed seeing "Possessions" during its rather short run in the West End may have been glad to have had the opportunity of witnessing its production by the Kensington Amateur Dramatic Society at the Guildhall School of Music Theatre last month.

This is a play almost entirely dependent for its effect upon characterization, each member of the small cast having a very definite appeal to make to the sympathy of the audience. This was in the main realized by the Kensington Amateurs, who acted with insight and experience. More might, we feel, have been made of the contrast between the two older women, the one embittered by suffering caring only for her son's happiness; the other spoilt and selfish, intent upon her daughter making a good match. Sir William Jesmond was admirably and most sympathetically played by Mr. Paget Cook, who appeared completely at his ease, except on one or two occasions, when he attempted to drop the refined manner which Jesmond had made his own for a tone and accent more in keeping with his origin. The company is to be heartily congratulated on this interesting and most enjoyable performance.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PLAYS.

For their fourth production of the eighteenth century comedies which they have set themselves to revive at the East London College (University of London), Professor Allardyce Nicoll and his enthusiastic roadjutors selected one of the plays of Mrs. Elizabeth Inchbald which, like her charming self, has fallen into almost complete oblivion. Mrs. Inchbald was, of course, a famous "blue stocking" in her day, a friend of the Kembles, and a protégée of the younger Colman who produced a number of her plays at Covent Garden; and not the least interesting feature of "Every One Has His Fault" is the prologue in which one of the first defenders of the rights of women in making the announcement that the author is "a woman" went on to defend the sex for taking up the pen and concluded:—

Let us not force them back with brow severe,
Within the pale of ignorance and fear,
Confined entirely to domestic arts,
Producing only children, pies, and tarts.

Can we imagine such a chivalrous extenuation being spoken to-day before "The Widow's Cruise" by Miss Joan Temple, "The Rescue Party" by Miss Phyllis Morris, or the forthcoming production of "Granite" by Miss Clemence Dane! A blend of that melodrama and sentiment which was found so popular in the "Comedy of Sensibility" of the eighteenth century, "Every One Has His Fault" was quite notable for Mr. Norman V. Norman's interpretation of the gay philanderer and divorcé, Sir Robert Ramble, who, discovering that his late spouse is threatening to marry again, ardently sets about to recapture her affections. This delicious scene in which Miss Veronica Turleigh gave Mr. Norman admirable support as the much-neglected, much-wooded wife, was quite in the vein of that pure comedy of sentiment of which Sheridan was a master and created the merriest amusement. The more tearful panel of the plot (telling how the rich and proud nobleman disowned his daughter and her children because she married a poor man), which always provoked lacrymatory deluge with eighteenth century playgoers, failed to damp a single jazz handkerchief; but the acting of Mr. Malcolm Morley, Miss Norma Varden and Mr. Alfred Gray was none the less faithfully traditional.

EXETER DRAMA LEAGUE.

The Exeter Drama League can look back on a successful winter season, mainly on the lines laid down in the November issue of DRAMA. On November 24 we welcomed the Newton Abbot Repertory Company and admired their rendering of "The Bishop's Candlesticks" (Norman McKinnel) and "Man Proposes" (L. du G. Peach). The Exeter University College Dramatic Society completed the bill with a stirring performance of "The Cat and the Cherub" (C. B. Fernald).

The production of "The Dover Road" (Milne) on December 9 aroused the enthusiasm of the local

Press and the Christmas holiday performance of "The Lilies of the Field" (J. H. Turner) was enjoyed by both actors and audience.

On Shrove Tuesday it was found impracticable to produce "The Great Adventure" (Bennett) and a triple bill was substituted. "E. & OE" (Crawshaw-Williams) if not exactly in the carnival spirit was powerfully acted, "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets" (Shaw) was successful both dramatically and pictorially, in spite of a Queen Elizabeth who was raised to that dignity on one full rehearsal; with "The Bracelet" (Sutro) made a varied programme.

"The Truth about Blayds" (Milne), which concluded the season on April 14, was a highly competent all-round performance and gave occasion for a fine piece of acting by Dr. Peach as Old Blayds.

Dr. L. du Garde Peach, who is well known to the British Drama League and many affiliated societies throughout the country, has now severed his three years' connexion with Exeter, and we should like to put on record how much we owe to his practical skill as producer, his gifts as an actor, and his unfeigned cheerfulness. Readings were also held of such varied plays as "The Playboy of the Western World" (Synge), "The Title" (Bennett), "The Return of the Prodigal" (Hankin), "The Farmer's Wife" (Phillipotts)—mainly in Devonian, pure and unexaggerated—"Miss Hobbs" (Jerome), "She Stoops to Conquer" (Goldsmith), "Outward Bound" (Sutton Vane) and "Mary Rose" (Barrie).

PLAYERS' DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

"LOVE—AND WHAT THEN?" AT THE CRANE HALL.

It says much for the acting of the members of the Players' Dramatic Society, who produced Basil Macdonald Hasting's comedy "Love—And What Then?" at the Crane Hall, Liverpool that they made a rather long evening quite amusing. Chief honours are due to Miss Ethel Antrobus and Mr. W. L. Pritchard, who made the characters of the romance-starved clergyman's wife and the understanding bishop almost credible. It would be invidious to single out any of the remainder of an excellent cast.

In order, presumably, that we might not have a surfeit of comedy, the play was preceded by Mr. John Drinkwater's one-act play "The Storm," in which Miss G. Shaw acted impressively. Both plays were enthusiastically received by a packed house.

OLD GODOLPHIN PLAYERS.

The Old Godolphin Players gave a very successful performance of "Love's Labour Lost" at the Century Theatre, London, on April 14.

All the actors played with ease and naturalness and great praise is due to Miss Muriel F. L. de Castro, the producer, for her excellent grouping of a large cast upon a somewhat small stage.

An all-female cast is apt to come to grief over the male parts and the Old Godolphins were ambitious in choosing a play which depends so largely on the

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

masculine element. Their ambition, however, was fully justified, the excellent playing of all the men being one of the features of the production. M. Dalston gave a delightful study of the debonaire Biron and P. Fagge as Custard got every ounce of fun out of the part.

It was a pity that the diction of most of the cast was not up to the standard of the acting, for some good work was spoiled through inaudibility.

THE SHOREDITCH DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

Sutton Vane is becoming almost as popular a dramatist with amateurs as Gertrude Jennings used to be. Another of the Drama League's affiliated Societies chose "Outward Bound" for production last month, this time the Shoreditch Drama Society, who presented it on April 28 at the big Town Hall, Shoreditch, the very size of which must have been something of a handicap to the players. Achievement in this production perhaps fell somewhat short of intention; there were signs of under-rehearsal and the voice of the prompter was heard a good deal. Even so, however, the evening will have been voted a success, for the interest of the audience was maintained throughout and, indeed, increased steadily up to the play's tactfully accomplished climax. And if it were said that the players lacked self-assurance, one would reply that this is a quality to be won by experience, and that Mr. John Bellamy and Mr. George Wildman both gave pleasantly urbane performances. Of the others the best were Mr. Ernest Calvert as Henry, Mr. Alfred Narborough as the Rev. William Duke and Mr. John Dower as Mr. Lingley.

The Society was to be complimented, too, on the suitable and useful little setting which it had made itself for the production. G. G. Y.

THE HULL PLAYGOERS' SOCIETY.

Since its foundation, some five years ago, the aim of the Hull Playgoers' Society has been to enable its members to keep in touch with all that is vital in the dramatic world by means of readings and the production of worthy plays.

This season the Society has given two public performances. The first was "Romeo and Juliet in a New Setting." This was produced by Mr. Haworth Earle; and an attempt was made to suggest the emotional key of each scene by means of lighting effects. The first scene was played before a backcloth depicting the city of Verona. The cloth was painted by Miss Jacobs from a print probably contemporary with the period of the story.

Use was made of the apron-stage. The audience was made to feel that they were co-operating in the presentation of the play.

The second production—Elmer Rice's "Adding Machine" was the cause of a good deal of controversy both inside and outside the Society. Before reading the book, some had jumped to the conclusion that this was one of those "unpleasant sex plays." As a result doubtless many who saw it were deeply disappointed. The play is very suitable for amateur production, providing that the

producer and stage manager know their business. Here the Society were fortunate in that Mrs. James Downs acted as producer and Mr. Sidney Thompson as stage-manager. Mrs. Downs succeeded in drilling her cast up to a pitch of acting which the papers described as "flawless," whilst Mr. Thompson's sets were so good as to cause the audience to gasp with delight as each scene was revealed. This play has such a grip that if the players have got past the pothooks of their craft there is no difficulty in holding an audience. In this instance the parts were well cast and well acted. All in all this production of the "Adding Machine" was one of which any playgoers' society might have been proud.

BRADFORD.

The students of the Shakespearean classes of the Carlton Street Technical and Commercial School under the city of Bradford Education Committee, gave the first part of Henry IV in its entirety on a Shakespearean stage on each night of the week commencing March 1. The setting is composed of black velvet curtains for traverse and backings so as to form inner and upper stages—there is also a wooden balcony and an open front—Brightened with heraldic shields and Boar's Head Sign, Plantagenet and Northumberland Standards, and beautifully coloured costumes. As each scene immediately followed upon the previous one without any interval the effect was of great beauty and made an easy unfolding of the story. Lighting was obtained from coloured footlights, and headlights behind the velvet "fly" and within the inner stage and from two strong shaded lamps on either side of the stage affixed to pillars flanking the same.

THE PANGBOURNE LITERARY, DRAMATIC AND MUSICAL GUILD.

The Winter Session of the Guild terminated on April 29 with a very spirited production of Oscar Wilde's "The Importance of Being Earnest," produced by Sir Arthur and Lady Griffith Boscawen.

Two Triple Bills have been produced, one in December, by Mrs. Ball, one in February by Mrs. Devenish and Miss Vera Palmer. The musical branch of the Guild is being developed by Mrs. Geoffrey Palmer, who conducts the orchestra. A members' meeting was given, when dramatic songs were acted with orchestral accompaniment. The literary side of the Guild included an evening in October of Readings from the works of John Masefield, and in November the Guild had the great compliment of being given a lecture by Mr. Kenneth Grahame, author of "The Golden Age." That so charming a writer is so seldom heard is a real loss to literature, and the Pangbourne Guild were fortunate, indeed, to be given the privilege.

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